

# STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL (SAC) Minutes: October 4, 2021

## 1. Introductions and Attendance

**Members:** Myke Halpin\*, Ken Mysogland, Deb Kelleher\*, Suprena Shuler\*, Stephanie Telford-Cotton, Elisabeth Cannata\*, Chris Scott\*, Samaris Rose, Michelle Sarafin\*, Judith Eisenberg\*, Lisa Girard, Dr. Irv Jennings\*, Whitney Rodriguez

\* = voting member

**Guests:** Sergio Alvarez, Sarah Gibson, Jon Jacaruso, Elizabeth Duryea, Diane Fasano, Sharon Davis, Rachel Levine, Stan Kasanowski, Malcolm Blue

## 2. RAC Updates: RAC Reports

*Region 1: Suprena Shuler reported:*

- No updates but will send last meeting minutes when she has them.

*Region 2: Judy Eisenberg reported:*

- We have a meeting planned for Friday with a full agenda.
- We are looking to underwrite funds for some fatherhood programming. Stephanie is beginning through Facebook polling to do some outreach to convene a family group for our first community conversation.
- We have a special presentation on a new grant in our area, focused on integrated primary care, care coordination for children and families.

*Region 3: Jon Jacaruso:*

- Region 3 meeting is scheduled for the 13<sup>th</sup>. We will go over the new assessment tool. We sent out a draft of a new agenda. We will discuss why we changed the agenda (engage parents and children up front) and focus on which services are working or not working.
- Going back to monthly meetings instead of quarterly. Will meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month

*Region 4: Sarah Gibson reported (Jennifer Nadeau is out today):*

- RAC met the week before last. It was the 1<sup>st</sup> time since June.
- Some leadership changes in Reg 4 DCF resulting in two office director vacancies (Hartford and Manchester)
- Talked about what is going on in the community and potential goals going forward - continuing stress in the schools related to COVID and being short staffed; balancing telehealth vs. in person; a rise in community violence specifically related to young people and our providers' continuing issues of staff retention and able to secure master level clinicians.
- We also had a presentation on the Quality Parenting Initiative
- Discussion regarding our voting members - We have 12 open vacancies and more terms expiring in the coming months. Discussed how we could, in a virtual environment, vote in new members. Some parent and community members don't have access to technology; hybrid voting scenario.
- Expectations around the assessment and getting feedback.
- Lost our youth tri-chair who moved onto a new opportunity so just 2 co-chairs.

*Region 5: Dr. Jennings reported:*

- We had our meeting last Monday evening after the DCF Provider Forum that took place Friday.
- Commentary of the current status of things in terms of service provision, lack of resources, lack of our reimbursement being increased over the last 10-12 years; SFIT homes extended to end of March but what programs will service them after March. There are Agencies in danger of going under.
- Deb added - Sergio will be starting a Racial Justice workgroup. We did a family first update which stated that we were waiting to hear more about implementation and whether or not our plan was accepted by the federal government; Sergio brought up the DCF prevention services pilot that's going on in the Waterbury school district. Folks were asking a lot of questions so we decided that our November meeting would be a presentation by Sergio and his staff.
- There was confusion about what mandated reporter training looks like. It might be worthwhile to offer it to our community members because there seemed to be quite a misunderstanding about what that looked like and what was reportable. Ken wants to hear what parents who have lived experience and

non-mandated reporters have to say about the messaging in that training, and where would they suggest changes in language and nuances.

- Providers struggling with staffing and funding. There is a backlog in exams for master's degree clinicians.
- Sergio reported that Reg 5 OD Siobhan Trotman was instrumental in talking about the racial justice work group and the regional group. We're having a meeting on 10/25 to talk about racial justice. We want to align whatever the RAC does with the regional offices instead of doing it in isolation. We noticed there is not enough time to talk about all things during our every other month RAC meetings, so on the month that we don't have the RAC we're thinking to hold either presentations or a special meeting. We are also going to have a presentation from the youth advisory board so that we can talk about how to best align our work to support them.

*Region 6: Michelle Sarafin reported:*

- Will be having our meeting this coming Thursday. At last meeting we focused on how we strengthen family and youth involvement in the RAC. We lost our youth tri-chair. We will try to identify ways to advocate for membership in the community.
- Started the verbal assessment of our RAC and identified that our provider attendance and DCF attendance is really strong and we really fluctuate with parent and youth participation.

3. **Assessment Tool Form:** Mike explained the context of this assessment tool and what would be the next steps. RACs will go through this assessment to identify strengths or weaknesses, and report back on the November meeting.

Elizabeth Duryea, the CEO administrator for the systems team added:

- There are some challenges and struggles with the provider network. We've tried to participate actively in the state advisory council getting feedback from each of the RACs around where do you see your strengths and where do you see some opportunities for growth?
- As others mentioned recruitment and retention of members is a challenge.
- What are some ways in which we can grow and improve with input from all of our members who participate in these conversations?
- These questions are intended to give us a guidepost to what the strengths are, where do we see some opportunities to look at some consistency in terms of how we approach this work in collaboration with all of you.
- FEEDBACK:
  - Add another number: On the RAC, make efforts to be informed by youth as well as the parents.
  - #13 - mentions "retains residents" does that mean the same thing?
  - There is nothing in there that addresses RAC meetings are consistently attended by parents and youth.
  - 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25 are singling RAC chairs out for commentary where no place else does it single out people to comment on whether they're doing their job or not (not DCF or any other group) Suggestion; change the wording from RAC Chairs to RAC *Meetings*
  - #11 Allows for reflection of attendance by people who reside in the region. Maybe that needs to be expanded to be more explicit, by people, including parents and youth who reside in the region. That might broaden it in a way that feels more inclusive.
  - This is a serious undertaking a lengthy discussion and RACs may need more time than November. We don't have full agreement on all of the wording of the questions so we need more time.
  - One question about RAC meetings is constantly attended by DCF leadership. How are we defining DCF leadership? Office Directors and above?
  - Questions overlap and need tweaking. Fewer questions which are better crafted.
- Next step - SAC Members should send their feedback about the assessment tool to Sarah Lockery by Friday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> so she has time to revise before the next meeting.

#### 4. Minutes

- Deb Kelleher made a motion to accept the September meeting minutes and Judith Eisenberg seconded. No objections. The SAC approved the September minutes as is.

#### 5. Membership

- We have some pending appointments. Prevence??, Sammy, Beth, Rachel.
- We have confirmation of Sarah's and Stephanie's.
- We still have vacancies for a Connecticut licensed healthcare provider and Adult caregiver of youth involved with services. That's 2 vacancies, preferably from different regions.

#### 6. SAC Member Advisement - Anyone not on a RAC wants to bring up

- Chris Scott SUN Scholars gave an update. All his stuff has been sent into the Governor's office. We will have a press release reporting we are receiving a philanthropic endeavor. So we're really growing and our work's being acknowledged. We'll probably ramp up a policy presentation sometime in late spring.

#### 7. SAC Legislation Committee Report: Sammi and Amani, Co-Chairs

Samaris Rose gave an overview of proposed legislations:

- AAC, Identified Adoptions.
- AAC, the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board
- Youth Education - DCF to oversee education, not so much be the educators, but to oversee it.
- Sammi asked folks to send her Bills that you are interested in. Maybe set up ZOOMs around those specific bills and maybe have some community members or even do it with the RAC to discuss in depth what we want to see added or changed.

#### 8. DCF Report - Ken Mysogland

- Education Proposal - The Department oversees the education of youth in juvenile justice facilities and who are incarcerated. We're going to be the body that oversees the delivering of education for youth in those facilities. These are youth who are in the care and custody of the JJ system not necessarily in DCF care.
- The 2nd proposal is to make it a suicide advisory board *across the lifespan*. This is a bill we're proposing with DMHAS so there isn't a separate youth advisory board or a separate one for adults. It's one that looks at this issue across the lifespan.

If there are other proposals that you would like to see that impact the department or that impact the greater children and families in the state, let's talk about them, get them out. There may be other ones that you see in your local communities that would enhance those children and families.

Since Commissioner was appointed in January of 2019, we have seen a 17% reduction in youth in care. We have reunified almost 900 children during the pandemic, 500+ kids had been adopted or had guardianship reunified. So we're very proud of the fact we are preventing youth from coming into care and kids who are in care are going home. We are not seeing any significant change in our repeat maltreatment rate or reentry rate. Those children who go home are staying home and that the right decisions across the spectrum are being made. When our families benefit a collaboration on the department and our private provider, inner community partner relationships families heal, are strengthened and are empowered, not solely because of the department. Every month we produce stories and highlight particular families who are in a better position because of all of our collective efforts.

We have now achieved about 44% of our kids who are in out-of-home placement are placed with kin. Our recent newsletter highlights one of our particular kinship providers, Rodney Moore, who was a social work supervisor out of New Haven.

We believe kinship placements are best for kids in the short, intermediate and long-term.

The *Parent's Right to Know* brochure has been updated with information on where families can go for free or reduced legal representation. I will flip that back to everybody as we are still in the process of revamping the entire document and advise families that they have the right to an attorney.

Janice Currier has retired effective Oct 1<sup>st</sup>. Janice is a 30 plus year veteran of the department. The most recent job was assistant chief over regions 2 and 3. Chris Lau is now overseeing regions 2 and 3 and Maritza Velez has been promoted to be the new assistant chief over regions 4 and 6.

We have 2 significant vacancies in DCF leadership, the office director for Hartford and Donna Maitland-Ward is transferring from her position as office director in Manchester to be the administrative program director in Hartford. So we are actively looking for an office director in both our Hartford and Manchester offices. This is really the beginning of our retirement silver tsunami. The department still is doing our work like we always do.

Our website has COVID-19 supports for children and families, regardless of whether or not you are involved with us. That website in the last 18 months had 53,000 unique people access it over 100,000 times. It has resources there for housing, substance use, intimate partner violence, reduced cost for broadband and assistance with utilities.

Our Family First Plan was submitted to the Children's Bureau in July. We are in the process of reviewing the additional pieces of documentation and clarity that the Children's Bureau would like, which will lead to an approval of our plan hopefully in the next couple of months. Then it becomes implementation stage. Dr. Sharon Davis is now the lead for Family First. JoShonda and I were charged with plan development. Dr. Davis is taking it from here.

On the plight of the children and families who have recently fled Afghanistan, a number of families are slotted to come to Connecticut and receive supports for housing, schooling, behavioral health treatment. If you are interested in supporting the families, there are two refugee organizations that are in desperate need of material supports as well as landlords to step forward to offer housing. Those agencies are Irisct.org and cirict.org. One of the most urgent needs right now is housing.

October 1st - 3 significant pieces of legislation.

- Updating the *Parent's Right to Know* brochure
- New seatbelt law that now people in the back seat now needs to be buckled up just like in the front seat.
- Acts of coercive control are now considered acts of family violence and can be utilized upon the application of a restraining order and in hearings to determine custody. (Suggestion: consider having somebody from the domestic violence field come and talk with us to help understand this law even more.)

Domestic Violence and Coercive Control - The definition of domestic violence has expanded now to include acts of coercive control; harassing somebody via text, limiting their financial needs, only putting the assets in their names, those things that impede our natural ability to act go about our business when those are impeded.

It's a pattern of behavior that unreasonably interferes with a person's freewill, such as unreasonably, controlling, regulating, or monitoring the family or household member's movements, communications, daily behavior, finances, economic resources, or access to services.

The Department will put out an explanation tomorrow to our staff about that new law with the wording. We're also going to put out a piece about how to access and complete a restraining order electronically.

Feedback:

Request to hear about the failed reunifications so we can help families avoid that moving forward. The group would like to hear some of the challenging ones through the DCF report.

Chris added we need to tackle post permanency supports to make sure that the families that are placed with kin have the supports they need. In this country, tracking has not been done and there is no data on post-adoption outcomes. We can capture income, education, criminal juvenile justice, families maintaining healthy relationships post adoption.

Ken responded that when the adoption decree is signed and that guardianship is transferred the department doesn't have the legal right to maintain contact with family. We only know that negative outcomes of when the child may have to come back into care. We're also in the process of developing a caregiver practice model.

Implementing the services to the kinship family first and then pulling them away if not needed. Not wait for them to ask.

Children should have an attorney beyond the age of 18, especially children that were adopted or children that are in kinship care.

#### **9. Retreat Planning:**

Chris reported that we met with Jerry; planning is going well. Sarah secured a location. June 29<sup>th</sup> at the Cascade. Question - we can invite others? We will have a limit. A certain number of slots for each RAC. Will have to check on that. Agenda for the retreat is posted on this meeting's agenda today. Not sure if there will be a virtual component. That will depend on the COVID pandemic and vaccinations. Conversational - not just lecture based so prefer in person.

#### **10. SAC Budget Balance:**

- No report

**Myke's Ending Quote** "I always wondered why somebody doesn't do something about that. Then I realized I was somebody." Lilly Tomlin, actress writer, producer

**Next meeting: November 1, 2021, 9:30 am - 12:00 pm**